

ARCHAEOLOGY IN OXFORD

*Oxford City Report to the Oxford City and County Archaeological Forum
September 2018- February 2019*

Not previously reported

Osney Power Station

In March historic building recording was undertaken by Oxford Archaeology at Osney Power Station. The building was constructed in 1892 and is a relatively early example of power station intended to generate electric power for public consumption. The power station ceased generating electricity in 1968 and the building was then used by Oxford University for the purposes of science experiments, most notably by the engineering department at St. Catherine's College, during the late 20th century.



Above left: Osney Power Station, viewed from the north-west.

Above right: Machinery in the primary phase at Osney Power Station.

Below right: Excavations on Queen Street in 2016 with 8-9th century surface in foreground and the 15th century Carfax tower in the background. Images courtesy of Oxford Archaeology.

Excavations at Nos 114-19 St Aldates and Nos 4-5 Queen Street

The publication draft of the exciting 2016 excavation at this site has been completed by Oxford Archaeology and will go forward to a special edition of Oxoniensia programmed for later this year. The site will also be the subject of a forthcoming Current Archaeology magazine article. Some of the key findings are summarised below.

The site is located right in the heart of the historic town and whilst the architects were required to amend the scheme to raise the basement level and thus protect much of the buried archaeology a number of localised interventions were required for lift pits and attenuation structures. Thus allowing parts of the historic tenement plots to be investigated.

The site has been occupied since late Saxon times and in the 12th-13th century fell within two properties known from documentary sources to have been in Jewish ownership, one known as Jacob's Hall, reputedly one of the most substantial private houses in Oxford, and the other owned by a person called Elias or Elekin.



The Middle and Late Saxon Town

Two recorded structures at the site may predate the laying out of the late Saxon street grid providing a rare insight into the early years of the town. One structure consisted of a series of floor layers and an associated posthole and the other consisted of a stakehole and sunken floor filled with organic matter, likely to be the remains of a former wattle lining. A charred grain from the first structure produced a late 8th-10th century radiocarbon date whilst material from the second structure produced a late 7th to late 9th century date range. However the OA report notes that at a 68.2 per cent confidence level both results match each other more closely, sitting within the late 8th to late 9th century date range. Nearby pits contained domestic waste and these continued to fill up into the late 10th or early 11th century when the nearby sunken floor structure had been replaced by building with a cellar pit, a building form that becomes common across the major street frontages of the town in this period.

Other finds from the site provide a snapshot of life in this part of Saxon Oxford. Meals were prepared in jars over a fired clay hearth or in an oven. Free-threshing wheat and hulled barley would have been made into pottages, porridges and bread. Oats would have provided fodder for livestock. Beef, mutton and pork were consumed and the butchery marks on the recovered cattle vertebrae indicate that the emphasis was on good-sized portions, rather than the quality or attractiveness of the cut. Chickens were kept for eggs, and oysters and freshwater fish were occasionally eaten. Spinning and bone working, the latter utilising deer bones as well as (probably) waste from domesticated species, were among the craft or domestic activities carried out nearby.

Right: Remains of a 13th/14th-century leather shoe. Image courtesy of Oxford Archaeology.



Rare evidence for Oxford's medieval Jewish community

In the post-Conquest period a stone-lined latrine was cut through the earlier rubbish pits. The latrine contained a rich assemblage of twelfth- or early thirteenth-century pottery, animal bone and other domestic material. The well-constructed nature of the feature suggested that it was associated with a house of a wealthy individual.

Given the documented history of this site there is a clear potential for the waste assemblage to be associated with members of the Jewish Community known to have been concentrated around the St Aldate's area from the 12th century through to the expulsion of Jews from England in 1290. The pottery from this phase was generally of a domestic character but included ceramic crucibles that point to small-scale metalworking. Based on current knowledge it is not possible to suggest the religious affinities of individuals in central Oxford from simply examining their pottery usage. However an obvious means by which an archaeological 'signature' of Jewish inhabitation might be detected is through a comparison of the animal bone assemblage with Jewish dietary law or *kashrut*. As Edward Biddulph from Oxford Archaeology explains in his forthcoming Current Archaeology article '*a Jewish assemblage would not be expected to contain any wild animals (including birds), pig bones, horse bones, bones showing disease, or bones from the hind-quarters of cattle. Shellfish and fish without fins or scales (for instance eels) would also be absent*'.

An analysis of the animal bones by Oxford Archaeology has indicated that there does seem to be a dramatic shift in the composition of the animal bone assemblage at this time with, for example, pig bones being completely absent. An attempt to corroborate these findings was made by undertaking organic residue analysis of animal fats or plant oils and waxes preserved on vessels. In theory pots used at the site during this phase should contain no trace of commodities prohibited by Jewish law. Samples were examined by Julie Dunne and Richard Evershed of the University of Bristol and showed that the pottery was not used to process or cook pork thus backing up the animal bone study. Biddulph notes that the results of the study are of great importance as '*until now, no Jewish signature has been identified in British*

zooarchaeology, and just two animal bone assemblages from medieval Jewries on the continent have been published'.

Later layers

A notable later feature was part of a below-ground cellar that contained 15th or 16th century pottery, almost exclusively comprised drinking vessels that are likely to have derived from one of the Inns that fronted St Aldates at this time. Another latrine, of 17th-18th century date, contained an assemblage of pottery, vessel glass, clay pipes and fruit remains that indicate wealthy inhabitants here during this time.

National Planning Policy Framework related field work in Oxford

Undergraduate and Access Centre, Wadham College

In October a targeted excavation and watching brief was undertaken at Wadham College prior to the construction of a new graduate centre. Isolated walls, pits and a burial (left in-situ) likely associated with the medieval Austin Friary were recorded. The report is forthcoming.

The Martin Building, St Cross Road

In October Asset Heritage Management undertook historic building recording on the Martin Building, constructed in 1966-67 to designs by Leslie Martin, prior to its demolition. The Martin Building was the first and only executed element of a three-phase masterplan for postgraduate accommodation for both St. Anne's College and Balliol College on Balliol's land in Holywell.

The Harlow Centre, Raymund Road, Oxford Phase II

In October a second phase of archaeological evaluation was undertaken by Cotswold Archaeology in at the Harlow Centre in New Marston. Five evaluation trenches were excavated but no significant archaeology was recorded. The previous evaluation phase had identified Middle Iron Age and Late Iron Age to Roman rural settlement remains further to the west.

No 26 Mill Lane Iffley

In November Keevill Heritage Ltd undertook historic building record of 26 Mill Lane, Iffley, in advance of alteration and extension of the Grade II listed house. The property is a detached house close to the centre of Iffley village. The earliest part of the building appears to be of mid-19th-century date (the list description suggests that it is 18th century).

The Cumberbatch Building (North, Staircase 4), Trinity College

In November historic building recording was undertaken by Asset Heritage Consulting on the Cumberbatch Building (North, Staircase 4), part of a complex constructed in 1964-68 to designs by Maguire & Murray, prior to its demolition.

Savile House extension, Mansfield Road

In November historic building recording was undertaken by Oxford Archaeology prior to the demolition of the Savile House extension on Mansfield Road. The building was constructed in 1935 as a large extension to the late Victorian Savile House which faces Mansfield Road. It was designed by a local architect, NW Harrison, who undertook numerous commissions in Oxford, particularly the development of North Oxford in the Edwardian period.

Warham House, Savile Road

In November historic building recording was undertaken by Oxford Archaeology prior to the demolition of Warham House. The house was constructed in c.1922 by the New College bursar as a private house in spacious surroundings and designed by a known (although relatively obscure) architect called Robert Langton-Cole in the arts and crafts tradition.

No 53 Woodstock Road

In November-December historic building recording was carried out by Keevill Heritage Ltd in advance of refurbishment and extension of the Grade II listed 53 Woodstock Road. The property is part of an early 19th-century terrace of houses (Nos 45-55), all of three storeys raised on basements.

Front of College Buildings, St Hildas College

In December an archaeological strip and record excavation was undertaken by Oxford Archaeology at St Hildas College prior to the completion of a new 'Front of College' redevelopment comprising student accommodation, porters lodge, middle common room, fellows' accommodation, academic and administrative offices and the erection of new pavilion building. This site is of interest because it is located close to the likely location of the medieval Boys Mill and close to the site of the post-medieval Milham Bridge and Milham ford, within the grounds of a 17th century town house and over the footprint of demolished early 19th century cottages. The excavation revealed a limited sequence of features including a boundary wall and ditch associated with the post-medieval orchard and a stone lined rubbish pit associated with the nearby post-medieval house. Finds included a small decorative mother of pearl buckle and a possible bone instrument tuning peg. In the vicinity of the 19th century cottages were a series of features including a stone line cess pit. On the western edge of the development a useful section of the natural geology exposed a relatively high band of Oxford Clay overlain by layers of alluvial clays. The report is forthcoming.

The Oxford Story Museum, Pembroke Street

In December Oxford Archaeology undertook targeted excavation and a watching brief during groundworks at the Oxford Story Museum. A small number of possible medieval and post-medieval wall lines and surfaces were identified. The report is forthcoming.

The Perch, Binsey

In January a trial trench was excavated by Thames Valley Archaeological Services to the rear of the Perch Public House at Binsey. The trench revealed a number of late medieval to post medieval pits and ditches. Further features were identified during a subsequent watching brief. The report is forthcoming.



Images right: Post-medieval pottery from features to the rear of the Perch Public House, Binsey. Photographs courtesy of Thames Valley Archaeological Services.

New Swift Tower, University Parks

In January an archaeological watching brief was undertaken by John Moore Heritage Services during the construction of a 2m x 2m foundation for a Swift Tower the University Parks. University Parks has a high potential for both Prehistoric and Roman remains; however no archaeological features or remains were discovered in the foundation trench. Natural gravel was recorded at 58.32m OD.

Brasenose Farm, Eastern By-Pass Road

In January and February a watching brief was been maintained by Foundations Archaeology during extension and conversion works at Brasenose Farm where the surviving farmhouse, stables and threshing barn date back to the 17th century. To date only undated postholes and a ditch have been recorded, the work is ongoing.

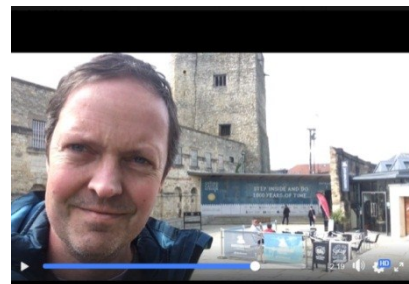
No 1a Cranham Street, Jericho

In January a trial trench was excavated to the rear of 1a Cranham Street Jericho by John Moore Heritage Services. The trench was to clarify whether the Late Neolithic-Early Bronze age linear barrow cemetery extended this far south across the Oxford gravel terrace. The trench recorded only a large pit containing Victorian pottery. The report is forthcoming.

Other News

Cooper Callas Excavation- video diary

A short (12 min) 'video diary' of the recent Cooper Callas excavation on Paradise Street (March-May in 2018) is available to watch on Facebook and You Tube (see links below). The site investigated the remains of the 18th-19th century Swan Brewery and medieval tenement remains from the suburb of St Thomas.



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h9GIOD_ubQ4

<https://www.facebook.com/OxfordCityCouncil/videos/vb.164718350242578/2210864095614996/?type=2&theater>

Swan Motors, Between Towns Road

This 2017 Roman site featured in a recent Oxford Mail story:

<https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/17395730.roman-pottery-found-at-cowley-between-towns-road-student-flats/?ref=mrb&lp=23>

Draft Oxford Local Plan 2032

The Oxford Local Plan submission draft consultation has now closed - the consultation period ran from 1 November 2018 until the 28 December 2018. The City Council policy team are now processing the representations received and will submit the Secretary of State for examination by the end of March.

https://www.oxford.gov.uk/info/20067/planning_policy/743/the_local_plan

Central Conservation Area Appraisal

A short consultation is to take place examining potential boundary extensions to the Central Conservation Area. The consultation is timetabled to begin in early February.

*David Radford, Archaeologist
Oxford City Council*